

FY 2024 BUDGET RECOMMENDATION BUDGET BRIEF

Maura T. Healey, Governor | Kimberley Driscoll, Lt. Governor

Serving Our Veterans

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Veterans' Services in the Commonwealth

Massachusetts is proud to provide our veterans and their families with quality support through the promotion of the Commonwealth's Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) to a cabinet-level executive office. In August 2022, Chapter 144 of the Acts of 2022, entitled *An Act Relative to the Governance, Structure, and Care of Veterans at the Commonwealth's Veterans' Homes*, was enacted, elevated DVS to a full secretariat effective March 1, 2023.

DVS's mission is to serve the Commonwealth's approximately 380,000 veterans and their families. DVS operates the Soldiers' Homes in Chelsea and Holyoke, administers a needs-based benefits program through the municipal veterans' agents, funds annuity benefits to Gold Star parents, widows and spouses, provides state funding to organizations offering homelessness services, transitional housing and outreach to veterans, acts as a liaison for those veterans seeking federal assistance through the Veterans' Administration, and operate two veterans' cemeteries.

As DVS continues to grow, it will work to fully staff its newly created fiscal, facilities, legislative, communications, and legal operations and develop new information technology, labor relations, and human resources structures to meet the needs of a secretariat.

Building for Change

To ensure that DVS can properly serve the Commonwealth's veterans, the Healey-Driscoll administration in its FY24 H.1 budget recommendation is recommending \$185.6 million for the new secretariat. This includes funding an operational, policy, and leadership infrastructure dedicated to veterans' services.

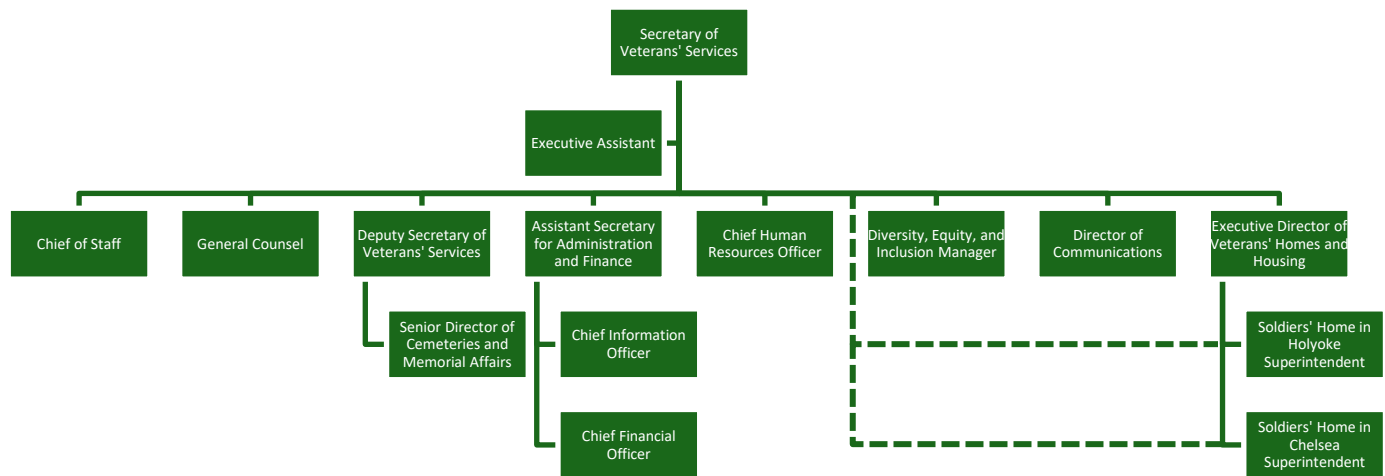


Figure 1: DVS's new leadership structure

Chapter 144 of the Acts of 2022 also established the Office of the Veteran Advocate (OVA), a new independent agency tasked with ensuring that Massachusetts's veterans receive the highest quality of services and care. H.1 recommends \$750,000 for OVA to ensure it has the resources necessary to safeguard our veterans.

Soldiers' Homes in Chelsea and Holyoke

H.1 recommends \$49 million for the Soldiers' Home in Chelsea (CHE), which covers increases due to inflation and staffing costs, offset by \$1.7 million in one-time costs budgeted in FY23 for a temporary dual-operation of its previous facility and its new long-term care facility. H.1 also recommends \$30 million for the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke (HLY), which covers inflation, payroll increases, and nursing staff overtime costs.

The Soldiers' Homes in Chelsea and Holyoke are also investing in serving the Commonwealth's veterans by replacing the current, outdated long-term care centers with modern, community-oriented facilities. These projects are financed through the Capital Investment Plan and with contributions from the federal government.

Soldiers' Home in Chelsea (CHE)

In May 2023, Chelsea's 136-bed long-term care Quigley Building will be phased out and replaced by the new Community Living Center (CLC). The \$200 million CLC project, up to 65% of which is reimbursed by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, has been a part of the state's Capital Investment Plan for the past few years. The CLC will allow CHE to increase its long-term care capacity, which includes skilled nursing beds, long-term care beds, and dementia units. The CLC is roughly 80,000 square feet larger than the ward-style Quigley Building, and CHE expects to house an additional 41 long-term patients per day in FY23, a 17.3% increase in capacity.

The new CLC at Chelsea will provide 154 long-term care beds for veterans, all with private bed and bathrooms as part of 14-bed "homes" that have a community living room, dining room, and kitchen. As a certified dementia care facility, the CLC will allow CHE to move away from serving only traditional long-term care residents and will also include a new sub-acute neighborhood that includes additional services (physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, respiratory therapy, certified dementia nurse).

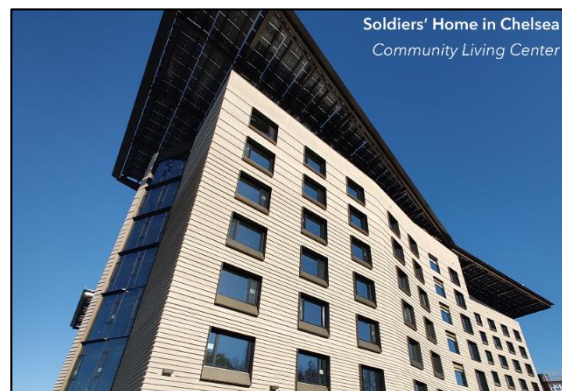


Figure 2: The new Community Living Center at the Soldiers' Home in Chelsea

Soldiers' Home in Holyoke (HLY)

HLY's new long-term care facility is currently in the design phase, with an expected opening date in 2027. This project will construct a new 350,000 sq. ft. long-term healthcare facility for 234 veterans that will replace the existing Holyoke Soldiers' Home. The new facility will include gardens, physical therapy facilities, a dental suite, hair salon, dining and social spaces, and the replacement of the existing site infrastructure.

The Commonwealth received \$160 million in conditional funding from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs for FY22 and will likely receive federal funding at a reimbursement rate of up to 65% for the remainder of the project in subsequent fiscal years. In the coming months, the Commonwealth will fulfill the program requirements to meet the conditions of federal funding. The Commonwealth will request additional federal funding in future years for this project.



Figure 3: The new Soldiers' Home in Holyoke's long-term care facility